

With America on the precipice of a so-called fiscal cliff, five Orange County congressmen must balance their earlier pledges not to raise taxes against the possibility that refusing to cut a deal with the White House will let Bush-era tax cuts expire.

President Barack Obama has made tax increases on the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans a cornerstone of his proposal to cut the deficit. House Republicans have slammed the president's plan, arguing it relies too heavily on tax increases instead of spending cuts to chip away at the debt.

This week, House Speaker John A. Boehner countered with a proposal to raise taxes on people who make \$1 million a year as opposed to Obama's plan to raise taxes on households that earn more than \$250,000.

If the two sides can't reach a deal by the end of the year, most Americans will experience tax increases, a scenario that could shove the country back into a recession, experts warn. The "fiscal cliff"—a term popularized by Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke—refers to the combination of Bush-era tax cuts expiring and across-the-board federal spending cuts set to take effect if no deal is reached.

Of the five congressmen representing Orange County Patch cities, all are Republicans who signed the Americans for Tax Reform pledge not to raise taxes. When pressed, none would specify if there were any circumstances in which they would go against their pledge and raise taxes on the wealthy to avert expiration of the Bush tax cuts for everyone else.

"We need to provide certainty to the economy and address our looming debt crisis, the sooner the better," Congressman Ed Royce, who represents Los Alamitos, said via email. "That means bringing in additional revenues through the closing of tax loopholes; I've always advocated for that. For example, I chaired our bipartisan Pork Busters Coalition to go after corporate welfare and close loopholes in the tax code and in the federal budget. We are drowning in debt primarily because of overspending in Washington and that has to be the major part of the solution. A compromise will rest on ironclad verification that the spending cuts are real."

Rep. John Campbell, who represents Newport Beach, Laguna Niguel, Laguna Beach and Lake Forest through the end of the year, told Fox News his bottom line was entitlement reform to significantly reduce the deficit.

"It's not about taxes," he told Fox. **"It's the deficit that will bring this country down. We are not talking about tax increases. I don't think the tax increases are a good idea. I don't think they'll reduce the deficit much. But my ... Democratic colleagues disagree. If that is what they want, fine. But in the end, we have to put together something that will make a significant reduction in this deficit. We can't do that without impacting the major entitlements."**

Loopholes will be the focus of Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, who represents Fountain Valley and Seal Beach until 2013, then will represent the new 48th District stretching from Seal Beach to Laguna Beach and Aliso Viejo.

"Mr. Rohrabacher is committed to avoiding the fiscal cliff by supporting a deal that drastically cuts spending in order to get our ever-increasing debt under control," spokeswoman Tara Olivia Setmayer said. "As part of that deal, he is open to considering new revenues—not by raising tax rates, but by reforming the tax code [and eliminating] certain preferences. But any deal must contain more in spending cuts than new revenue. Our constituents have worked hard for their money and are not supportive of having their rates raised simply so that Washington bureaucrats can waste it on bloated government programs."

Congressman Darrell Issa, who will represent Dana Point, San Clemente, Coto De Caza, San Juan Capistrano and Ladera Ranch in the new 49th District, has come out against the President's current proposal.

"The tax cut passed in 2001, which lowered taxes for all Americans, was written with an expiration date," Issa spokesman Frederick Hill said. "Tax rates are set to rise to previous levels unless Congress and the president reach a comprehensive agreement on spending cuts and an alternative approach to tax issues. Congressman Issa would not support the plan President Obama has outlined. Rep. Issa would only lend his support to a fair approach making real and meaningful reductions in anticipated spending and a tax policy that does not approach small businesses and job creators as targets to pay for expanded government spending."

Rep. Gary Miller, who currently represents Mission Viejo and Rancho Santa Margarita, did not return calls regarding his stance on taxes and the fiscal cliff.